

May 23, 2025

Melissa Ann Ehrenreich  
Executive Director  
Indigenous Conservation Council of the Chesapeake Bay  
2000 Duke Street, Suite 300  
Alexandria, VA 22314

Re: Principals' Staff Committee Response to the ICC Declaration

Dear Chiefs Adkins, Howard, Shields, Anderson, Brown, Richardson, and Adams:

The Chesapeake Bay Program's Principals' Staff Committee (PSC) thanks you for sharing your [declaration](#), dated January 15, 2025, with the Program's Management Board. We further thank you for the follow up conversations many of us have had with staff of the Indigenous Conservation Council (ICC) of the Chesapeake Bay, during which we have been able to learn more about the organization and your aims.

The ICC's goals to "advance the sovereignty and capacity of tribes in the Chesapeake Bay region to reconnect and care for our ancestral lands as original stewards" is a laudable one that we support. We also acknowledge that federally recognized tribes hold a unique status as sovereign states, not stakeholders, and that it is important for the Chesapeake Bay Program to treat them as such, while also working to engage appropriately with other, non-federally recognized Indigenous and descendant communities in the Chesapeake watershed. Finally, we appreciate the tremendous value that Indigenous Guardianship programs, which amplify Indigenous-led conservation and sustainable development efforts, have brought to both the Tribal Nations and landscape and water protections efforts where they have launched, and agree that such efforts are beneficial to consider in the Chesapeake region.

We welcome your interest in engaging formally with the Chesapeake Bay Program to achieve our shared goal of restoring the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed. As you know, the Program operates under the [Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement](#), which was signed in 2014 by the Governors of the six watershed states, the Mayor of Washington D.C., the Chair of the Chesapeake Bay Commission, and the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (on behalf of the federal government). In late 2024, these signatories, who make up the Program's Executive Council, [charged](#) the PSC with making revisions by the end of 2025 to continue and update the commitments of the *2014 Agreement*. Part of this charge is to examine the partnership's structure and process for opportunities to achieve our commitments in an effective, efficient, and inclusive manner. We are pleased to share that we have directed that these revisions consider your declaration as part of its scope, and we are also pleased that ICC has been an active participant in the ongoing revisions of the text of *Agreement*.

In response to your declaration, we are recommending that the Executive Council consider it at their 2025 meeting. The Executive Council's charge was explicit that the present revisions should not constitute entering into a new agreement. While adding a new signatory as part of these revisions would be in violation of that charge, the Program's commitment of adaptive management allows for the Executive Council to issue a new charge to further explore ideas related to your declaration. This may include exploring mechanisms by which the partnership could expand to include new signatories, like ICC, considering factors such as:

- How best to represent and involve Tribes and Indigenous communities across the watershed through the formal channels of the Program, including appropriately engaging with federally recognized tribes as well as state recognized and self-identified Indigenous communities and individuals;
- How an Indigenous Guardianship Program or other programs might fit into the partnership;
- The extent to which an associated Advisory Committee, or other avenues and structures, could help elevate these factors across the partnership.

We appreciate your outreach and look forward to collaborating to elevate Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and participation in the partnership to protect, restore, and conserve the Chesapeake Bay and the lands and waters that surround it.

Sincerely,

Josh Kurtz  
Chair, Principals' Staff Committee